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ON CROMLEACS NEAR TRAMORE IN THE COUNTY OF WATERFORD ; WITH REMARKS ON THE CLASSIFICATION OF ANCIENT IRISH EARTHEN AND MEGLITHIC STRUCTURES.

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WHAT is a Cromleac ? If I was asked this question by a critical antiquary, I could not answer it to his satisfaction, nor could he to my own. This is obviously a defect in our archæological nomenclature, and the following remarks are offered with a view to arrive at some definite ideas on this subject.

In such an inquiry as this, the primary consideration should be the form, and mode of construction, of the stone chamber.

If we refer to some of our best authorities for information on this subject, we find the following statement by the well-known Danish archæologist, Mr. Worsaae, in his work on Danish Prehistoric Antiquities (translated by W. J. Thoms, 1849):—

“ Stone chambers, or cromleacs, or low barrows encircled with stones, which completely accord with the cromleacs of our Stone Period, occur over the whole of Northern Germany, England, Ireland, the northern parts of Holland, and the west and south of France.”

Here the stone chamber is called “ a cromleac,” no matter what its form, and the low barrow is considered to be an essential ingredient of the perfected structure, and our ideas thus become perplexed, rather than enlightened, on this particular class of antiquities.

Some antiquaries of note have, however, adopted this definition of a cromleac, as we find in the essay “ On the Comparison of Danish Cromleacs with those of Britanny, the Channel Islands, and Great Britain, by the Rev. W. C. Lukis, M. A., F. S. A.,” read before the Wiltshire Archæological and Natural History Society, in August, 1861. In this admirable memoir the author is disposed to adopt Mr. Worsaae’s definition of a cromleac, as a tumulus enclosing a chamber formed of large stones placed one upon the other, and surrounded by a circle of upright stones at the base of the mound. At pages 164 and 165, Mr. Lukis admits that a deal of confusion has arisen “ from the want of a proper generally recognised nomenclature amongst European antiquaries,” as explanatory of the various kinds of early megalithic remains ; and he would have no objection to get rid of the word “ cromleac,” at the same time not offering us another name to supply its place.

For my part, I cannot see what valid objection there can be to the name cromleac ; and I believe it is now so well established that we must retain it, and that we can do so with every propriety.

In the year 1857 Sir William Wilde, M. D., in the first volume of the " Catalogue of the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy," at page 180, when referring to the various objects of antiquity found in the sepulchral chamber discovered in the low tumulus on Knockmaroon Hill, in the Phoenix Park,¹ remarks that " this discovery went far to establish the belief that cromleacs were but uncovered tumuli, which originally contained sepulchral remains." This statement is even more vague than that of Mr. Worsaae, whose ideas on the subject it partially embodies. From this it would appear that to constitute a " cromleac" the tumulus must be "uncovered" (by which I suppose is meant "removed") from off the inner chamber (if there happened to be one), which chamber, when uncovered, then becomes a cromleac. We certainly want something more precise than this.

Sir Gardiner Wilkinson, in his memoir upon British Remains on Dartmoor, accepts the word " cromleac;" and though the name may not date back further than the sixteenth century, and its etymology is unknown, unless it be a compound of the Irish words *crom*, bowed or bending, and *leac*, a stone, it will answer all the purposes intended, if applied to one particular kind of rude stone structure, and not made to do duty for a whole group of them.

Colonel Meadows Taylor, in his singularly interesting memoir on the Cairns, Kistvaens, and Cromleacs, and other Celtic, Druidical, or Scythian Monuments in the Dekhan, published in the " Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy," vol. xxiv., part 5, 1865, adopts the word cromleac, and thus defines it:—" A rectangular structure, formed of three slabs of stone, and roofed with a horizontal slab, the whole above ground, and open at one side;" while he defines a kistvaen, or stone box, as " a chamber formed of four slabs, and covered by a horizontal slab, whether it has been constructed above ground, or covered by a tumulus." These definitions of the two structures explain clearly the precise difference between them, and they very nearly apply to such remains existing in Europe.

In the " Essai sur les Dolmens," by the Baron de Bonstetten, of Geneva, that learned antiquary classifies the European megalithic structures into two classes:—I. " Dolmens apparentes;" II. " Dolmens couvert d' un tumulus en terre ou en cailloux." The first class includes the following ten varieties:—

¹ A corruption of *Fionn-uip̄ð* (pron. *feenishk*), which means clear or limpid water. See essay "On the Corruptions in

Irish Topographical Names," by Patrick W. Joyce, A. M., "Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy," vol. ix., part 3.

1. " Dolmens à dalle tombale, ce'st à dire une ou plusieurs dalles posées à plat sur le sol, entre des supports.
2. " Sans dalle tombale.
3. " à enceinte de pierres dresseés (menhirs).
4. " sans enceinte de menhirs [*maen-hir*, long or upright stone].
5. " à compartiments interieurs.
6. " simples [rectangular cist with covering slab].
7. " sur un tertre (tumulus).
8. " sur le sol naturel.
9. " supports dressés en hauteur.
10. " supports dressés en longeur."

The second class includes the following seven varieties :—

1. " Dolmens à corridor et à chambre avec compartiments.
2. " sans corridor et chambre.
3. " simples.
4. " à dalles tombales.
5. " sans dalles tombales.
6. " à enceints de menhirs.
7. " sans enceinte."

So far this is clear, and sufficiently comprehensive; and it would appear that the simple dolmen would most nearly resemble one of our cromleacs.

Sir Gardiner Wilkinson, in his memoir noted above, thus classifies the ancient British remains :—

1. " The sacred circle.
2. The circle cairn, and concentric circle.
3. The barrow or tumulus (the Celtic 'crug' or mound, and the Saxon 'low').
4. The kistvaen, or stone box.
5. The avenue, or parallelithon.
6. The cromleac.
7. The maenhir, or long (upright) stone.
8. The tolmen, or maen-an-tol (holed stone).
9. The logan, or rocking stone.
10. The rock idol.
11. The rock basin (Irish *bullaun*?).
12. The markings and concentric rings on stones.
13. The hut circle, domed or beehive hut.
14. The walled village, or pound.
15. The boundary line.
16. Roads.
17. Bridges.
18. Camps."

Here we have the cromleac, as distinct from the kistvaen or stone box constructed below the soil, or enveloped in a mound; and the two structures need never be confounded. At page 49 it is stated that the sepulchral chamber is not properly a cromleac, and to this I cordially agree.

If we now confine ourselves to the classification of those Pagan or early Christian structures, earthen or stone, or both combined, sepulchral or otherwise, preserved in Ireland, they are capable of being grouped as follows :—

1. The stone circle.
2. The menhir, or standing stone, or gallaun.
3. The barrow, or simple earthen tumulus.
4. The chambered barrow, with surrounding circle of stones.
5. The ringed barrow, surrounded by one or more fosses and mounds.
6. The ringed and platformed barrow, or barrow with flat raised platform attached, the whole surrounded by one or more fosses and mounds.
7. The rath, or earthen circular rampart, surrounded by one or more fosses and mounds, the inner face of the central circle, and occasionally those of the concentric ramparts, being sometimes faced with stone, in which case the term rath-caher may be applied.
8. The rectangular rath, with single surrounding fosse.
9. The cairn, or mound of broken stones.
10. The chambered cairn, with a surrounding row of flags.
11. The kistvaen, or stone box—a rude rectangular stone chamber of four or many more stones covered with flat flags, and constructed either below or on the soil, or covered with a mound of clay and stones : these are called by the peasantry “leabas,” or “beds,” “ti,” or “house,” a term which is seldom applied to the cromleac proper. In some instances the kistvaen is formed by a double row of upright flags.
12. The cromleac, or large block of stone poised in an inclined position on four or more upright blocks, thus forming a rude chamber usually open at one end, and sometimes divided internally by a single upright slab ; the whole bearing evidence of having been constructed on the surface, and never having been enclosed in a mound.
13. The caher, or caissel—a circular enclosure, formed entirely of massive dry masonry, the wall being pierced with a passage allowing access to the interior, and in most instances having had flights of steps leading to a parapet.
14. The cloghaun, or beehive-shaped stone hut, circular or rectangular in plan, either single, or with two or three chambers connected by narrow passages, and formed beneath an equal number of connected domes.¹

¹ See paper by the writer on the ancient Celtic city of Fahan, Ventry, county

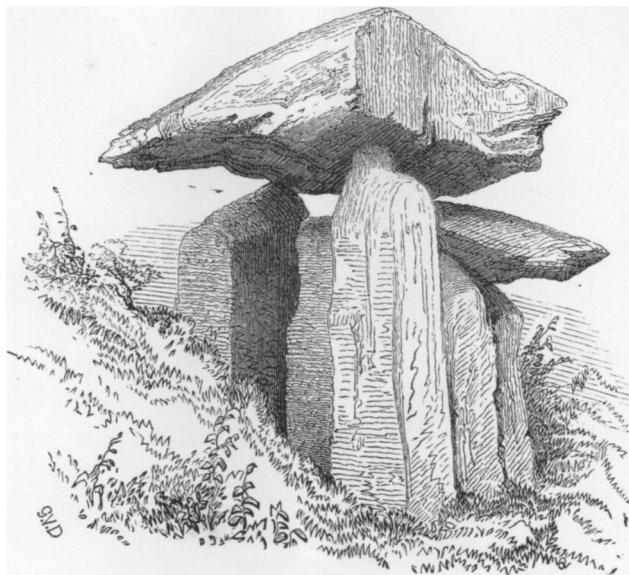
of Kerry, “Journal of the Archaeological Institute of Great Britain,” vol. for 1858.

15. The cnocān, or stone hut, beehive-shaped, and either circular or angular in plan, the whole covered by a thick wall of earth.
16. The foslea, or long rectangular and narrow cell, formed of upright flags, and covered with horizontal flags.
17. The tolmen, or holed stone.
18. The rock basin, or bullaun.
19. The sepulchral dome-shaped chamber, formed of stone, either singly or in groups of three or more, ranged round a central chamber, the whole enclosed in a mound of broken stones and earth, and having a narrow entrance passage from the exterior of the mound.
20. The burrow, or subterranean dome-shaped chamber, single or compound : when the latter, one chamber is connected with another by a low narrow passage ; sometimes the burrow is constructed in the centre of a rath, and sometimes in the open country.

We may thus classify some of our most well marked Pagan or early Christian remains ; for those structures of the cloghaun type may really be comparatively recent, and it is evident that the cromleac occupies a very distinct position amongst them.

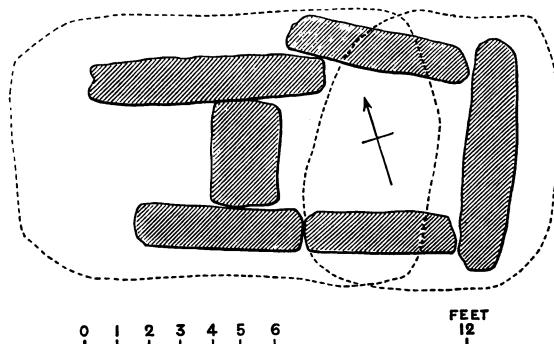
The primary consideration in this inquiry is the form and mode of construction of the cromleac, as distinct from the kistvaen, or true sepulchral chamber, no matter what its form. It is quite possible that the cromleac, as I propose to define it, was not the absolute burying place or tomb, but was the commemorative mausoleum, as it were, of the tribe, or its most distinguished family or person. So far as my information goes, I have never heard or read of any sepulchral remains having been found beneath the covering slab of a cromleac, *as I understand the term*; and as yet we have, I believe, no instance of a *true cromleac* having been exhumed from a mound of earth or stones. Chambers' covered with flat flags have been thus found, but all tradition, and the present appearance of the cromleac proper, assure us that they were ever in the same subaërial state as we now see them. I believe that the stone-covered single chambers which have been found in the centre of some tumuli would not in their mode of construction fulfil the conditions necessary to make a cromleac, according to my interpretation of the word.

The somewhat remarkable cromleacs which form the subject of this paper are not only highly characteristic of their class, but they present some marked and novel features, which up to the present, I believe, have not been described. I allude to the fact that the two outermost upright supporting stones have a transverse stone like a diaphragm between them, very nearly equal to them in height, and which thus closes-in half of the structure, giving it a kistvaen

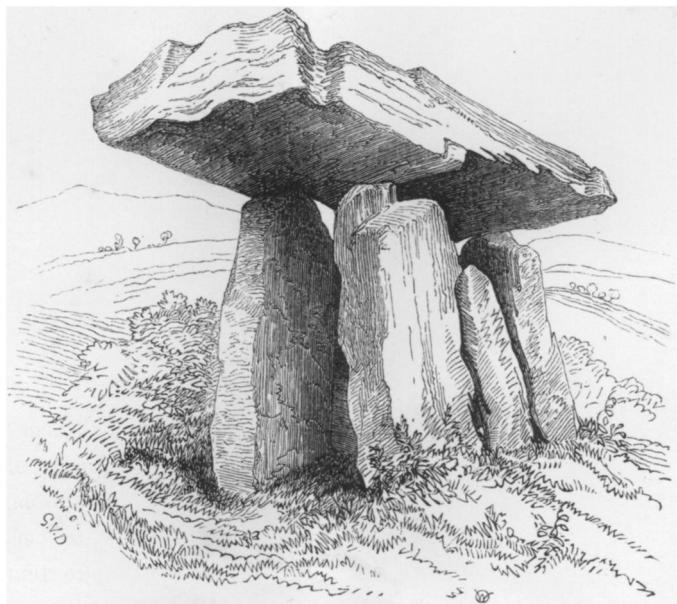


Cromleac, townland of Knockeen, Co. Waterford.

[View looking N. E.]

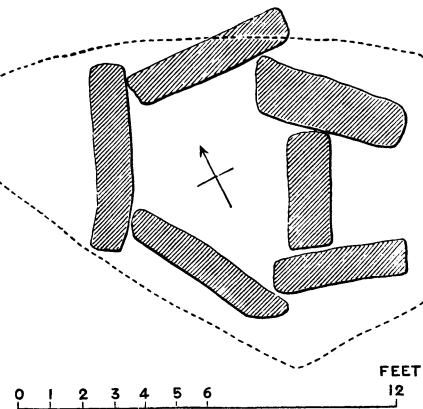


Plan of Knockeen Cromleac.



Cromleac, townland of Gaulstown, Co. Waterford.

[View looking S. W.]



Plan of Gaulstown Cromleac.

character in plan, while in two instances the large table or covering stone rests at its depressed end on a smaller horizontal slab.

The illustration, Plate I., representing the cromleac in the townland of Knockeen, at S. E. corner of the termon wall of the old church (near Sporthouse), Co. Waterford, affords an example of the two peculiarities alluded to; and the whole structure is remarkable for its solidity, and the perfect carrying out of a unity of design.

The orientation of this structure is N. W. and S. E.; the open end, or that presented to the view in the engraving, being that facing to the N. W.

The upright supporting stones are six in number, and are arranged rectangularly, so as to form a distinct chamber at the S. E. end, measuring 7×4 feet, by 6 feet 6 inches in height; the side stones at the N. W. end projecting beyond the transverse or diaphragm stone a distance of 3 feet 6 inches.

The large covering slab measures 12 feet 6 inches \times 8 feet, with an average thickness of 1 foot 6 inches, thus giving a weight of something like 4 tons; the supplemental covering stone measuring 7 feet \times 8 feet.

The height of the supporting stone nearest in the view is 8 feet 6 inches above the present level of the ground and the total height of the structure to the top surface of the large covering slab is 12 feet 6 inches: at the open or N. W. end the supporting stones are 3 feet 3 inches apart. The blocks are formed of the rudely cleaved felspathic dark grey trap of the district.

The illustration, Plate II., is that of the cromleac in the townland of Gaulstown, in the same county, on the northern flank of Carrick-a-roirk Hill.¹

Here we have a structure very similar to the former in general design, though different from it in some details, viz.:—The absence of the lower and supplemental covering slab; and the open end of the chamber facing to the S. of E., while the inner chamber is rudely hexagonal in plan, owing to the peculiar way in which the upright slabs have been arranged (see plan).

The inner chamber measures 7 feet \times 6 feet 4 inches at its maximum width, having a height of 7 feet; the diaphragm stone being 3 feet 3 inches wide; the outer open space being 2 feet deep, and narrowing to 2 feet 6 inches at its external edge. The covering or table stone is 12 feet \times 7 feet at its S. E. end, with an average thickness of one foot, which thus gives a weight of about 3 tons; the height of the supporting stones at the E. S. E. or open end of the structure is about 8 feet 6 inches. These blocks, like those forming the other cromleac, have been derived from the local trappian rocks. At the distance of 31 feet N. W. from this cromleac there occurs a true kist-

¹ *Anglice*, the Rock of the Prospect.

vaen, constructed in the soil ; this chamber is formed of several large slabs set on edge, and measures 16 feet or 17 feet in length, by about 4 feet 6 inches or 5 feet in width ; it was originally covered horizontally by three flags, one of which yet remains, and measures 8 feet \times 5 feet 6 inches in width.

Here we have clear evidence to show that the kistvaen was a structure very distinct from the cromleac.

The third example (Plates III. and IV.) I have to offer is that of the cromleac in the townland of Ballynageeragh, county of Waterford, and not very distant from that last described.

This structure as viewed from the S. E. has a most singular appearance, owing to the form of the covering stone, and the skilful manner in which it is poised on two supports ; that at the S. W. or raised end being an upright slab ; the other, to the N. E., being a rounded flat stone laid on the ends of the remaining three stones forming the chamber (see plan).

The large table stone measures 12 feet \times 8 feet, with an average thickness of one foot, and may therefore be about 3 tons in weight ; and at its most elevated or N. W. end it is 6 feet from the present level of the ground. The chamber beneath is simply rectangular in plan, the stones forming it being all inclined inwards, as shown in the view, looking N. E.

In speculating as to the means by which these large table stones have been so securely poised on their supports, I have long thought that they were not first raised in the air, and then allowed to drop on to their supports, but that they were dragged up an inclined plane of earth, which had been piled around the upright stones, previously securely placed, and were then made to sink gradually on to them by the careful removal of the earth ; and when the covering slab rested securely on these uprights, the mound of earth was totally removed, and thus the structure gained the appearance of having been constructed subaërially.

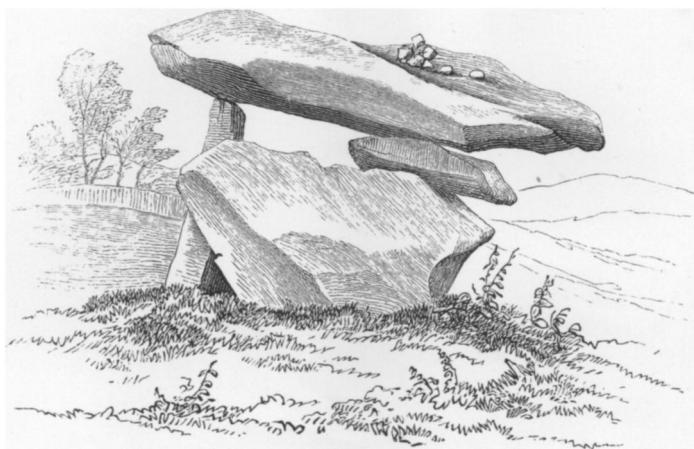
I by no means wish to take credit as being the first to suggest this mode of construction as applicable to our cromleacs, or other megalithic structures, where enormous blocks of stone have been left resting on vertical supports. The late King of Denmark, and for aught I know other antiquaries, have suggested the same theory, which would, I think, apply with equal force to such structures as Stonehenge. That such was the mode of construction actually adopted by the cromleac builders is, I think, almost proved by the fact that we occasionally find half-finished and abandoned cromleacs, as the rude mechanical appliances known to the builders were totally unequal to the completion of the work on the failure of their first rude attempt.

On the west side of the glen, just below Ballyphilip Bridge, county of Waterford, I found an enormous block of grit, one end



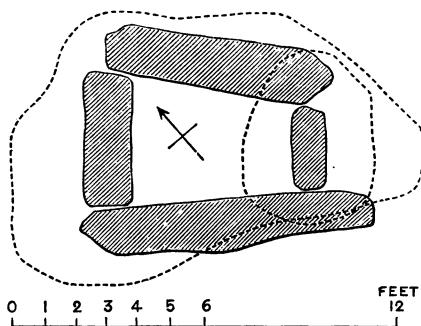
Cromleac, townland of Ballynageeragh, Co. Waterford.

[View looking N. W.]



Cromleac, townland of Ballynageeragh, Co. Waterford.

[View looking N. E.]



Plan of Ballynageeragh Cromleac.

of which rested on two low supporting stones, while the other was propped up by a wall of dry masonry 3 feet high ; in this instance we have an example of an unfinished and abandoned cromleac.¹ Another example of a defective and abandoned cromleac is to be seen in the demesne of Headford, near the gate lodge ; this consists of an angular block of grey Silurian grit, measuring 9 feet 6 inches \times 6 feet \times 3 feet 8 inches, the weight of which is fully 6 tons ; its eastern edge rests on the ground, while the western side is tilted up and supported by a single block of grit, measuring 3 feet in length by 1 foot 6 inches thick. Some blocks of rock lie near at hand, as if intended to have formed a portion of the structure ; it appears to me that, when the large table stone by some means or other failed to rest properly on its intended supports, the work was abandoned, and some other boulder stone in the neighbourhood selected for the purpose ; at all events, the structure is incomplete.

That the foregoing observations may be clearly understood, I would thus define a cromleac :—

A megalithic chamber, usually rectangular and sometimes open at one end, formed of four or more upright slabs, on which is poised in a *slanting position* a large covering stone, the whole structure resting on the natural soil, and presenting no indications of having ever been enveloped in a mound or tumulus.

I cannot conclude these brief remarks better than by the following quotations—the first, a portion of the review in “The Athenæum” (21st of April, 1866) of Lieut.-Col. Forbes Leslie’s work “On the Early Races of Scotland, and their Monuments,” alluding to the so-called Druids’ altar or cromleac, is as follows :—

“The western maritime division of the Continent of Europe presents vast aggregations of them in various localities, and they are found extending across the Mediterranean, and occupying a wide field in Africa. Recent exploration has traced them over Tartary, and as far as the Chinese frontier, and into the centre of the Peninsula of India. Iranian and Turanian, Caucasian and Semitic, Hamite and Allophylian, Celtic and Gothic waves of population have swept over the portions of the area which the structures occupy ; but there remains no distinct record of any monument of this class except in the Old Testament.

“These people were neither Druids, nor Phœnicians, nor Gauls, nor Celts who set up these monuments, but a people who once existed all over Europe, Asia and parts of Africa, and whose usages had passed away before any history but that of the Hebrews began.

“On the other hand, the low-age school of speculation puts Stonehenge within the fifth century of the Christian era, and brings down the use of the stone table as a sepulchral monument to a time when the capi-

¹ See the seventh volume of the Antiquarian Sketches presented by me to

the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, where this cromleac is illustrated.

tals of columns had already begun to display the characteristic forms known in architecture as early English."

The truth of these remarks few will question; and the pleasing fallacy of trying to speculate on the age of such works as evinced by their mode of construction, or the rude devices with which they are occasionally decorated, is admirably exposed by the following remarks of Palgrave, in his "History of Normandy and England," vol. i., p. 49 :—

"Celtic history . . . has been rendered the meaningless vacuity of literature by the unbounded speculations of the learned. When will archæologists be convinced that men-hir and pul-ven, cromleac and kistvaen tell us nothing ? and from nothing, nothing comes. You can no more judge of their age than the eye estimate the height of the clouds. These shapeless masses impart but one lesson—the impossibility of recovering *by induction* any knowledge of the speechless past."

So far as our present information leads us, we must believe that the cromleac builders, and the constructors of the chambered cairns, and other megalithic structures, were of a race most widespread over the northern hemisphere wherever it was habitable—that we have lost all record of the locality from whence that race originally sprang, of their name, or their language—and that the present races, who possibly exterminated them, were themselves so rude and unlettered, that they had not the intelligence to transmit to their descendants the traditional history of the people they dispossessed.
